

The Delusion of Formalism.

BY J. H. WORST.

Forms without formalism, and rites without ritualism may seem paradoxical and still contain truth. The Pharisee, ancient and modern, won the title of hypocrite on account of his blindness relative to this fact. Formality as such fails in that its influence does not reach up to and effect its divine mission.

Accepting the Gospel as a whole involves implicit observance of all Christ-ordained ordinances and commandments. This observance is either to make a record embodying Christian merit, or the merit lies above and beyond the fact of obedience. Obedience is either to establish a record or to discipline the soul. Whether it accomplishes the one or the other, depends upon our conception of their design and the purpose for which we observe them. In this we become either machines or disciples—learners. The soul is naturally carnal, that is to say, controlled by carnality, and under such control incapable of voluntarily freeing itself.

So severe is nature that we "must be born" anew and become a new creature in Christ Jesus. This involves form. The form either affects the heart, or the body, or both. It may affect only the body—make it wet—but when dry again it is as it was before. The figure of external washing or cleansing typifies the purification of the soul, and as such accomplishes that purpose if the sacrament is spiritually discerned. The "burial with Christ by baptism into death" represents the crucifixion and burial of the old sinful nature, if it produces that effect upon the heart, and only then, and "rising to walk in newness of life" must reach beyond the literal coming forth from the water womb and centre in the hidden man.

If Christ went down into the grave a natural body and rose a glorified body, our burial in baptism, and birth from baptism, must produce a corresponding change. Viewed literally, the only change is from dry to wet, but spiritually, it is a change from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son, and that change affects the inner man primarily, and the conduct of the outer man from the inner.

In other words the form and figure are not for the physical, but for the spiritual *through* the physical. Formalism confines it to the physical and rests the merit with the fact. The same may be said of prayer, foot-washing, Supper and eucharist. A man may observe them all with only the *fact* of obedience in view, and the spiritual nature, the thing God sought to discipline through them, is left a pauper in a temple whose base is oft washed and through whose upper door the sacred emblems are often cast. This body that has been washed in baptism, these feet washed again and again, the stomach that is made the receptacle of the Lord's Supper and the symbols of his broken body and shed blood, the head that is covered with a veil or cap, and the body that is encased with the toga of tradition will soon be shrouded and consigned to the tomb. Shall the tomb become the receptacle of our religion? It will of our formality, and with too many, I fear, it will contain all the religion they ever had.

When the soul or spirit is released, shall it, or shall the earth that encased it, have received the discipline? Let the answer come. Shall the forms of worship reach only to the animated dust or the spirit within it?

Shall we advocate immersion in water for the body, and sprinkling of the spirit, or fly to the other extreme and sprinkle with water and immersion in the spirit of God? But while both elements abound in unstinted proportions, why be economical of either. I prefer both and so do you, and why don't we teach it, act it, live it, instead of profess it. If I had to be economical of either, I should choose more of the spirit and less of the water, but I advocate the fulness of each—abundance, even extravagance. In this you all agree with me, but the past record of Dunkardism makes one smile a sad, sickly smile with tears behind it.

The cry has been water, water; water for the body, water for the feet, and beef for the stomach, and while the body grew corpulent and waxed

boastful, the little starved soul stood wistfully in the background.

Age added neither grace nor refinement nor discipline to the soul. The baser sins were restrained, a fine outward morality was maintained, but all the miserly instincts, many secret lusts are entertained, and love narrowed down to such as would submit to the lash or could sit down at the same communion table under rigorous prescriptions, while hatred, envy, and malice were and still are cultivated against all who fell victims of religious homicide.

What we want now is anything but this soul-dwarfing and soul-starving policy. No curtailing of religious forms, no abrogation of ordinances, but less idolatry relative to them.

Christianity is a condition and not a form; and after death the formalities that aided in its development will still exist as simple adjuncts for others to use, and will be wholly divorced from what constitutes Christianity.

Globes, charts and apparatus are schoolroom adjuncts to facilitate mental development, but the student goes away from the college halls leaving behind him those essential aids, and carrying in him only the knowledge—the imperishable knowledge obtained partly through their use.

Why then should we ever cling to those things only given as helps, worshiping *them* instead of worshiping God, and keeping them purer than the heart they were designed to purify.

Satan has a mission still to perform, and if he can rivet the virtue to the external form and keep it from the heart he is satisfied. An "obedient" or a moral sinner is as satisfactory to him as it is anomalous. If he cannot destroy a rite and thereby swindle the church out of its advantage, he will next pursue the more acceptable course of destroying its virtue by breaking the connection that conveys its influence to the heart.

A church that wilfully excludes many of the gospel ordinances from its service does wrong, but no worse than the church that accepts them all only to squander their power and destroy their mission through formality.

I hope I am understood, and that in all our services from prayer to benediction, that worship must reach the soul and impart to it strength and purity, so that we may possess that "divine nature" and gravitate in habit and desire toward the centre of spiritual gravity—heaven.

Not Doing Our Duty.

Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these ye did it not unto me. Matt. 25: 45.

A great many sins are very plain. We would not for a moment question the nature of lying, stealing, evil speaking, petty spites and backbiting, spring from an evil heart. Pride and hilarity cannot escape censure and are inconsistent with any great measure of excellence. But there are sins so modest and self-justifying at exposure that we are almost as ready to excuse as to condemn them. Some would call them failures rather than faults, pitiable rather than blameworthy. They spring up in an unfruitful heart of not doing its duty, and we will call them sins of omission, neglected opportunities, unused talents and undone good. And it matters little, however we may regard them we are held as answerable in God's word as for others of a more positive and serious nature or character. And how important that we make the right estimate of them. Our Lord strips us of all excuses, no matter how much insignificance or inability we may plead. Some may plead ignorance, while others will try and justify themselves in some other way. The servant with but one talent could have reasoned this way as some are ready to do. What can be expected of me with but one talent? How poor a figure will I make beside the one with five talents or the one with ten talents? How frequent do we hear and find comparatively just such excuses? Christian professors will say, "Oh if I could pray or talk like this brother or that sister I would take part in the prayer meeting or other services too, but what little I could do would hardly honor my Lord or add to my Master's store. I will go and hide my Lord's money and I will not be blamed for squandering my Lord's money in pleasure, as the prodigal, or using it for myself like the unfaithful steward." But let us consider the result. What was the consequence of neglect of duty? Thou wicked and slothful servant is the Master's prompt and sharp rebuke. Take from him what little he hath.

Talents that lay idle suffer loss, unused gifts and graces die out of the soul. We know that muscles never exercised lose strength. Waste and final loss of all are the natural recompense of backward-

ness and slothfulness. Depart from me ye cursed unto everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels. Is not this a mournful and unexpected ending? Mark it was not of an evil life but of an idle and aimless one, of nothing done for God or man. It will not save us to do no harm, we must do good. But the ever ready plea I with my poor advantages, I with my want of influence, I with my lack of experience, I with no gift at all, I feed the hungry, I visit the sick, I seek the lost. Or I with my business, I with my houses and lands, I with my enjoyments. Am I my brother's keeper? It cannot be my concern to comfort the mourner, clothe the naked, save the erring, the churches and institutions must do that. And so responsibilities are shirked, opportunities are lost and time is spent and the work which the Lord has given us to do for our fellowmen is left undone. Not doing our duty confronts us at the last day with its perilous issues, offsetting all of the gains expected by belonging to some religious society or denomination.

We can not too seriously study the solemn account of the last judgment given by our Lord himself and recorded in the 25th chapter of Matthew. The grounds upon which the guilty were condemned appear to us singularly simple. He shall say to those on the left hand, depart from me ye cursed into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels, for I was hungry and ye gave me no meat, thirsty and ye gave me no drink, a stranger and ye took me not in, naked and ye clothed me not, sick and in prison and ye visited me not. Then shall they answer him saying, Lord when saw we the hungry, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick and in prison and ministered thee. Then he answered them saying, verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye did it not unto one of the least of these of my brethren ye did it not unto me. Only sins of omission are mentioned here. It was simply not doing their duty. Yet this neglect duty with the want of love from which these duties spring disqualifies us for blessedness and as surely shuts us out of heaven, as the more open sins of an evil life. Mark the surprise of the condemned at the ground of their condemnation. When saw we thee they ask for they had not recognized these duties at all. And why were they not? Because their hearts were not prepared for it. It is the love of God shed abroad in our hearts that will prompt us to do these deeds of goodness. Unlovely and selfish lives can not produce them. Ought and must may prick the conscience of many a one, but they are poor helpers in the task. When our Lord washed his disciple's feet he said, If I your Lord and Master have washed your feet ye also ought to wash one another's feet. John 13: 14. This word ought, undoubtedly has, pricked the heart and conscience of many Christian professors but has been a poor help to them in obeying the Savior's command.

Our Lord and Savior's life was a natural outgiving of love and sympathy and helpfulness, and since he is our exemplar how can we in this respect follow him? There is but one thing which will effectually help us and that is love the love of God in the soul. Love is the fulfilling of the law, or rather it is a law unto itself, not on tables of stone but in willing hearts; not an impulse excited now and then by necessity or occasion, but an abiding principle within, opening both eye and ear to sights and sounds of sorrow, and stretching out the hand with generous sympathy and self-denial to bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ. We should not be satisfied with the leisure and comfort of our homes, with prosperous friends, pleasant engagements and agreeable occupations. We should not be so filled with our own personal interests, so preoccupied by our own cares, or anxieties, or sorrows, that we have no room left for the claims of the helpless and suffering, looking to us for sympathy and help. We cannot burrow in ourselves and in our own work. That diligence is godless diligence which begins and ends in self. That rest is a sin which is satisfied with its own ease. We have a talent to use an office, to fill a work, to do an influence, to exert for the Lord in behalf of his poor erring, straying lost ones, and he expects of us a diligent and thrifty exercise of all our energies to accomplish it. It will finally be the welcome plaudit, Come ye blessed of my Father inherit the kingdom, or the awful sentence, Depart from me ye cursed into everlasting fire and they go away to meet him no more.

Dear reader, the clearness with which Christ makes known what will be the future state of the righteous, and the wicked, and the liability of all to be at any time fixed in heaven or hell for eternity, should lead each one of us without further delay to prepare to obtain the one and escape the other. May the good Lord grant us grace to discharge our Christian duties and privileges, so that we may be so unspeakable happy as to hear the welcome plaudit, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord, is my prayer.

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